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"THE CHURCH."

By a Layman,

A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

LONDON:
W. RIDGWAY, 169, PICCADILLY, W.
1883.

Price Sixpence. Post free on receipt of seven stamps.

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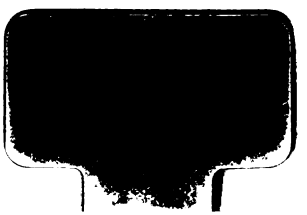

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G. NORMAN AND SON, PRINTERS, HART STREET,
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"THE CHURCH."

To promote a more careful and more definite use of the term "*Church*," and to put a check on its application to a mythical and indefinite idea, is the object here in view. This limitation of the subject under consideration must be borne in mind, otherwise the real drift of these remarks may be lost sight of, and attention given to other lines of thought only incidentally touched upon.

When we use this word "Church," do we ourselves always know precisely what we allude to, and do we always use it in a manner to be clearly understood by others? Few probably will admit that they do use this familiar word without knowing definitely what they mean; nevertheless, such may be the case, or, at all events, they may fail to make their meaning clear to their hearers.

As an example of the definite use of the term, take an architect, who, when about to build a "Church," prepares plans and specifications, such as he can not only understand himself, but such as will be clear and definite to the mind of a builder. On the contrary, as an instance of the

indefinite use of the word, or the use of it in a manner not to be understood by the hearers, probably not even by the author himself, we may take the text of the sermon preached before the Queen by the late Dean Hook, alluded to in his life, as follows:—

"In June of this year (1838), he preached at the "Chapel Royal, before the young Queen and her "court, the memorable sermon, '*Hear the Church.*' "It deserves the epithet which I have applied to "it, because it excited much commotion at the "time in the political and fashionable world, and "ran through twenty-eight editions, in which "about one hundred thousand copies were sold."

The text was from Matt. xviii. 17—"*Hear the "Church.*" The question immediately arises, What are we to hear—to whom are we to listen? The answer is given as follows by Dr. Hook:— "*We wish to speak of the Church, not as an estab-"lishment, but as* THE *Church*"—"*A religious society "—a particular society of Christians*"—"*The "Church universal*"—"*The Church catholic.*" "*In her it is that the Third Person of the Blessed "Trinity abideth for ever.*" "*The Church is insti-"tuted to convey to you pardon upon your repent-"ance and grace in time of need.*"

The Church above indicated is one whose voice

can be heard with the outward ear—it is a religious society—it is universal—catholic—the Holy Spirit abideth in her—the Church conveys pardon and grace. If Dr. Hook had said, "Hear me," his meaning would have been perfectly clear. A man's voice may be heard, or the voice or decision of a definite assembly may be heard; but there is no outward and visible universal Church capable of making itself heard by any man who may be exhorted to "Hear the Church." Again, when it is stated that the Holy Spirit abides in the Church, what are we to understand by this expression—what is the nature of this "Church" in which the Holy Spirit is said to abide? Bear in mind that the Church referred to is something outward and visible, capable of being heard with the outward ear—which in fact we are told "to hear." The in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all true Christians, in the hearts of all those who constitute the great invisible Church, cannot be referred to, for it is palpably out of the question to hear the voice of this vast body of which we ourselves have no cognizance. The fact is, the Christian minister, the outward and visible Church of the realm, and the universal invisible Church of all true Christians, are here mixed up in utter confusion. Much the same kind of con-

fusion appears to exist in the minds of those who speak of the primitive, pure, Apostolic Church—the early Church, previous to the introduction of those lamentable heresies and divisions which have so marred its work—the one true Church of which our Church of England is a branch, descended by unbroken apostolic succession.

If ever there had been a *primitive, pure, Apostolic Church*, such as above alluded to, it would indeed be a matter of great interest to "Hear "the Church," assuming that such Church had any means of communication with us. The writings of the so-called Fathers are the authorities usually alluded to; it can, however, by no means be admitted that the writers called "Fathers" constituted *the Church*, and that in reading them we "*hear the Church*," any more than it can be admitted that the readers of Dean Hook or Bishop Ryle, a thousand years hence, will "hear "the Church of England." They will read the works of two excellent men, each conscientiously working on the lines he believed to be right, though, in many respects, these lines were very diverse. Readers will, no doubt, a thousand years hence, deal with these writers precisely as they do now with the so-called "Fathers;" they will accept all that is in accordance with their own judg-

ment, and reject the rest. No man now accepts as gospel all that is stated in the "Fathers;" all will admit there is in them much good; all will admit that there is much contradictory rubbish. A sifting process is essential, and each man will sift according to the standard he adopts. One man will take his Bible, another the principles of the ecclesiastical corporation to which he belongs; the Romanist will take the Pope as his final authority, the half-sceptic will take his own inner consciousness as his ultimate guide.

The only result of seeking "Church authority" from ancient records will be the holding up of some portions of certain writings, be they Dean Hook's, Bishop Ryle's, or the "Fathers'," as the doctrines of the "Church" of their day; the particular writers, and the particular portions of their writings, being selected according to the particular views of each party.

Speaking in the present day of Dean Hook, Bishop Ryle, or any other modern men of mark, we think of them as individuals, men of learning, ability and high principle, we respect them, even though we may differ from them on important points, but with regard to the so-called "Fathers," they are spoken of as "*The Fathers*" as though they were a contemporary body of men who held

council together; whereas, is it not the fact that they were widely-scattered individuals, men of learning, ability and high principle, just as much so as Dean Hook or Bishop Ryle, but with no more authority? The sanction of prayers for the dead by a "Father" or by many "Fathers" is of no more value or authority whatever than the modern sanction of that practice recently implied by a Bishop of the Church of England.

It is not here asserted whether prayers for the dead are or are not sanctioned by Scripture, but the Bishop's reference should certainly be to Scripture, not to the "Fathers," as the authority for our action at the present time. Let those who have "honest doubts" on such points follow the example of the more noble Bereans, and search the Scriptures, rather than follow the example of the Bishop of Peterborough, who appeals to the "Fathers" and the "primitive" Church.

The simple fact is, that we cannot hear the *primitive pure Apostolic Church* for two reasons. In the first place there never was such a Church, and in the second if there had been, we have no reliable means of ascertaining the views and doctrines of such Church. We are in fact driven, whether we will or no, to the sole authority of the written word of God: to this standard all other

writers must be brought, and by that test they must stand or fall, if we desire to seek the truth and the truth alone.

Let us consider what is intended by the term "The primitive Church," for there are two myths, two goddesses set up in these days, upheld by two very different classes of men, by men who would utterly repudiate the accusation of idolatry, but who nevertheless place these two myths in a position of power and authority, trenching very closely upon the power and authority of a god. These two goddesses are "The Church," and "Nature," the great law-giver; both spoken of as "She." All matter it is held obeys and always has obeyed "the Laws of Nature," therefore Nature must have existed previously to matter in order to lay down these Laws, and Nature moreover must have been endued with power to control matter. The difference between this and a pre-existent God is slight and difficult to maintain—in fact the attributes of a personal God are constantly applied to Nature by those who either deny the existence of God, or deny the possibility of any knowledge of God. But what are these immutable laws of this goddess Nature? Are they not resolvable into—*facts—observations—inferences?* Facts, true as far as they go, but open to error from the

omission of other facts which affect the question in hand; then, man's observation, palpably open to defect; and finally man's inferences, as palpably open to error. The so-called immutable laws of Nature are but man's views and observations of the ways and works of the Almighty Creator and Preserver of all things. Next, with regard to the pure primitive Apostolic Church, let us endeavour to investigate the idea and to discover what is really intended or referred to. When—where—and in what form did that Church exist, which is now spoken of as "She," as "our Mother," as the authority, which is to be taken as our guide at the present time in conjunction with, and too often in the place of, the written word of God?

The word "Church" occurs 98 times in the New Testament—once referring to the Jewish polity which does not affect the present question; 85 times the word refers to an outward and visible body of professing Christians—always in allusion to some known and definite body of men. As in Matt., instructions with regard to an offending brother—"Tell it to the Church," that is, speak to a definite body of men capable of hearing and replying; Acts, "Added to the Church," that is, to the recognized body of Christians at Jerusalem; Rom., "Greet the Church;"

Philemon, "Church in thy house," &c. In every case the reference is to a known and definite body united together under the bonds of Christian brotherhood, but never to all Christians in all localities as though all belonged to one outward and visible Church. In a number of texts the term is used in the plural, as for instance "the "Seven Churches which are in Asia." There is nowhere the slightest indication of what is now called corporate union, no warrant whatever for comparing these outward and visible corporate bodies of Christians to the *Coat of Christ without seam.* They were distinct and separate organizations—all independent, none subject one to another. There is no sanction here for speaking of any one particular body of Christians as "*The Church*" to be referred to as "She." Nor is there any sanction for an imaginary corporate union to be spoken of in that manner. Scripture speaks of "Churches" when alluding to outward and visible bodies, but never of "The Church," as though all Christians in various parts of the world were included in one outward and visible corporate body.

The word "Church" is used 12 times in reference to the whole body of true believers, whose hearts and whose membership are known absolutely to God alone—Matt. xvi. 18, "Upon

this rock ("Upon that rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ") I will build my Church"—that is, build up all true-hearted Christians, "*all lively stones*," irrespective of all outward and visible ecclesiastical corporations. Again, Eph. i. 22, "Gave Him to be the head over all "things to the Church, which is His body, the "fulness of Him that filleth all in all." Clearly this "Church" consists of all true Christians, of all those who are included in "*the fulness of Him* "*that filleth all in all.*" Eph. v. 23, "*For the* "*husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is* "*the head of the Church.*" When the Angel showed St. John "the bride, the Lamb's wife," it was clearly the great body of all true Christians, not the heterogeneous congregations here below. The body of Christ is not an outward and visible Church containing some true Christians, some lukewarm members, and some evidently hypocrites. Judas Iscariot, Demas, Simon Magus, and many others condemned in Scripture, were clearly not members of the Body of Christ, though they were members of the outward and visible Church of their day.

The Scriptures therefore, it will be observed, use the word "Church" very frequently, but always with a clear and definite meaning. There is no

allusion to any outward and visible or to any mystical body, which can be invoked as "She," and held up as a guide to and authority for us at the present time.

The "Primitive Christian Church" commenced with the call of Andrew and Peter. From that time till the resurrection, a body of men was attached to Christ, who acted under His personal supervision as a corporate body to which men might belong as members, and from which they might separate. It was an outward and visible recognized body, known as "*Disciples*," twelve of whom were appointed to high office, and seventy were endued with special authority as evangelists, thus constituting an outward and visible organized Church. If purity and reliability can be looked for in any Church, surely it will be found here, amongst men selected by Christ Himself, continually under His own direct guidance and teaching; but what do we find? There is a Judas Iscariot amongst them; and again "*from "that time many of his disciples went back and "walked no more with him.*" This was the primitive Church, and it certainly cannot be looked upon as pure, not at least till we have eliminated Judas Iscariot and those who walked no more with Christ; but the very fact of such elimination

being required would be the overthrow of any "Church" as an authority. Again, if ever a united Church could be looked for, it would certainly be in this "*primitive Church;*" here surely there can be no possibility of "*dissent;*" but what do we find? By no means a "coat without seam:" on the contrary we find "*John answering "Him, and saying, Master, we saw one casting out "devils in Thy name, and we forbade him, because "he followeth not us, but Jesus said, forbid him not.*"

The really "primitive Church" terminated at the Ascension. Though it had been under Christ's personal rule, it was not pure, nor was it free from dissent; that is, there were men casting out devils and performing miracles in Christ's name, approved of by Him, but disallowed by the Apostles as not being associated with them as a body.

In the next place we have to consider "The "Apostolic Church." This period may be said to commence on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was then poured forth in a manner not before experienced, and the Apostles then came out as men of altogether a different stamp from their previous selves. On the preaching of Peter "*there "were added to them three thousand souls.*" The body of disciples at Jerusalem was at once formed into an outward and visible Church—"*The mul-*

"*titude of them that believed were of one heart*— "*and had all things common.*" But soon we hear of "a murmuring of the Grecians against "the Hebrews," a trifling difficulty leading to development of Church organization, and to the appointment of Church Officers, "appointed over "this business" at Jerusalem. Next we read of the appointment of "*Elders in every Church.*" Writing to the Church at Corinth, St. Paul mentions, "*First apostles, secondarily prophets,* "*thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of* "*healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues,*" indicating a highly-organized ecclesiastical corporate body in that locality. We read of many other "Churches" founded in various parts, but we have no indication of anything of the nature of a general corporate union, nothing which will warrant these various distinct bodies being spoken of as "The Apostolic Church," in the singular number. There is nothing that can, with the least propriety, be referred to as "She." There is no indication of such corporate union visible here on earth as would render possible the use of the expression, "*The mind of 'The Church.'*" Let any one who thinks we may look to, and be guided by, the "mind" of a Church, attempt to note down the "mind" of the Church of England

at the present time. All unity will at once vanish amidst a scene of conflicting opinions, and this not only upon forms and formularies, but even upon fundamental doctrines.

The only case of reference from one Church to another mentioned in the New Testament, is that of Antioch to Jerusalem—"*Certain men which "came down from Judæa, taught the brethren (at "Antioch), and said, Except ye be circumcised after "the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved;*" that is to say, a false doctrine was propagated at Antioch by members of the Church of Judæa. Paul and Barnabas withstood this Judaizing doctrine, but apparently did not altogether convince those who had adopted the doctrine objected to. The question, therefore, was put to "*The Apostles "and Elders*" at Jerusalem. It was discussed, and finally decided, "*That we trouble not them "which from among the Gentiles are turned to "God, &c.;*" that is, the ecclesiastical authorities of the Church of Judæa repudiated the false doctrine which had been "taught" by erring members of their own body, thus giving a decision in the Convocation of Jerusalem, adverse to the doctrine propagated at Antioch by these unauthorized members of the Church of Judæa. It is quite possible, in fact it is probable, that

St. Paul, not being one of the twelve original Apostles, was not looked upon by the Church of Antioch as altogether an apostolic authority. Paul's position, as his life and character appear to us, is no doubt very different from the estimation in which he would be held at that time by men who had seen but little of him. We hear of him first as a persecutor; in the 9th of Acts we read of his conversion: after that he was some time in retirement; and in the 15th chapter this dispute is reported at Antioch. It may well, therefore, be supposed that Paul's authority was at that time not sufficiently established at once to overrule the dictum of earnest men, coming direct from the Apostolic Church of Judæa. A reference would naturally be made to the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem, to the locality whence these false doctrines had emanated, without in the least implying corporate union, or general subordination of the one ecclesiastical body to the other.

Having come to the conclusion that during the Apostolic period there were many outward and visible "Churches,"—not one outward and visible corporate body, including all Christians, which might be spoken of as "The Church"—let us consider the condition of these various Churches. Were they pure—were they in a condition which

might be described as before the introduction of "heresies"—were they such as might be taken as a guide concurrently with Holy Scripture? Might we safely take as our guide the Bible and the Apostolic Churches?

At Cornith there were divisions much as at the present time—"I of Paul, I of Apollos, and I of "Christ." That Church is addressed as "*carnal*," "*babes in Christ.*" "*Envying*," "*strife*," "*divi-*" "*sions*," were prominent. But the address to the Seven Churches of Asia, gives the best summary of the condition of Churches in the Apostolic period. Ephesus—"*I have somewhat against thee,* "*because thou has left thy first love.*" Sardis—"*Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead.*" Laodicea—"*Thou art neither cold nor hot*" and "*knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable,* "*and poor, and blind and naked.*" Pergamos—"*Thou hast there, them that hold the doctrine of* "*Balaam, so hast thou also them that hold the doc-*"*trine of the Nicolaitanes.*" Thyatira—"*Thou* "*sufferest that woman Jezebel which calleth herself* "*a 'prophetess,' to teach and seduce my servants.*" Far be it from us to speak disparagingly of these early Christians, quotations on the other side would no doubt show a more favourable picture. The dark side is here taken in order to show

that even these Churches were not pure, were not free from corrupt practice, nor yet from false doctrine—to show that we are not authorized to hold any doctrine, or to admit of corrupt practices because we have the example of the apostolic Churches. In the 1 Cor. xi. 19, we hear of heresies and corrupt practices regarding the Lord's supper: again, xiv. 26, "*every one hath a psalm, a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation;*" xv. 12, "*Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?*" Gal. i. 6, "*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel;*" ii. 11, "*But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed;*" iii. 1, "*O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth;*" iv. 9, "*how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?*" v. 7, "*ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?*" Such are the Churches some would hold up as authority for us.

If that myth, *The one outward and visible early Church, The one Apostolic Church*, be looked into, it will be found never to have existed, but instead,

a number of independent Apostolic Churches, each with its own peculiarities and its own failings, with much to admire, much to reverence, but with no authority to command imitation of the practices or adoption of the doctrines of that early period. The practice may have been good, the doctrine true, but each must be judged by the standard of Scripture.

In the sermon before alluded to, Dr. Hook speaks of a Church of the present day as "*a branch*," he puts the question "*whether the* "*Society of Christians established by Government,* "*and invested with certain emoluments and privi-* "*leges, be a pure branch of that Church, which was* "*instituted by our blessed Lord and His Apostles?*" In this passage the "*Society of Christians*" clearly refers to the outward and visible corporation of the Church of England—but what is "The Church" "instituted by our Lord"?

An outward and visible ecclesiastical corporation can only be a branch of some other outward and visible Church. An outward and visible Church established by Government cannot be a branch of the great invisible Church or body of all true Christians, though it may be a true Church as defined by the Articles. Individuals may be members of both, of either, or of neither—but the

impropriety is at once apparent of speaking of an outward and visible ecclesiastical establishment as a branch of a body which is identified solely by spiritual condition, and that known to God alone. If the invisible Church be not referred to, the question remains what outward and visible Church was established by our Lord and His Apostles, of which the Church of England is a branch? It may be safely replied, there never has been any such Church which could claim to be the root and origin of the Church of England. The Church of England stands on the same footing as did stand the Church of Cornith, of Galatia, &c., and as stands at the present time the Church of Rome—all independent. This passage in the sermon affords a good example of the confusion between an existing outward and visible ecclesiastical corporation, and the invisible Church of all true Christians, founded by our Lord and His Apostles. When our Lord says, "*I am the Vine*, "*ye are the branches*," the meaning is clear and definite; the expression refers to the spiritual union between Christ and all true Christians. The branches were branches of Himself, not of a Church.

If the scattered Churches of the world were supposed to be united in "general councils," and

if the action of the general councils be spoken of as the action of the "Church," let it be made clear that all that is intended by or included in the term "*Church*" is a comparatively very small body of ecclesiastics in no way representative of the various bodies of Christians, no more so than the present Convocation is representative of the Church of England. That of Canterbury consists of 176 members, 45 of whom are Bishops and Deans nominated by the Prime Minister of the day; of the rest, 62 are nominees of the Bishops, 23 Proctors for Chapters, only 46 being elected, and that only by beneficed clergy—unbeneficed clergy having no vote, and the great body of the Church, the laymen, having no voice at all. To speak of Convocation as representing the Church of England, sitting *pari passu* with Parliament, is a most palpable absurdity. If general Councils be alluded to as the "Church," let it be clearly understood that the "Church" in question was not primitive, nor was it Apostolic. How far these so-called general Councils were general, and how far their conduct was Christian, may be left to the decision of those acquainted with their proceedings.

Let any man who cannot himself devote much time to the study of the "*Fathers*," but who never-

theless desires to know how far they are reliable as "authorities," read "Doctrinal Errors of the "early Fathers," by William Osburn, published in 1835, written by one who then saw what was coming upon us, but whose work was before its time—very few then caring what the Fathers either said or thought. Let him also read "Ancient Christianity," by Isaac Taylor.

The condition of "The Church," during Christ's personal presence, has been considered, and also the condition of the scattered Churches during the lifetime of the Apostles. The question still remains: Is there anything connected with post Apostolic Christianity which authorizes us to speak of the Churches of that period, as in any way united in corporate union? Did Rome effect this union?—did the Greek Church? If so, let the term Romish or Greek be used; but let it be explained, what outpouring of the Spirit, similar to that on the day of Pentecost, is supposed to have raised any ecclesiastical corporation to a condition of greater purity, or of higher authority than the scattered Churches of the times of the Apostles.

As before stated, the object in view in this paper is to induce those who use the word "Church," but who are somewhat hazy in their ideas, to consider most seriously the effect of using

this term in a confused or erroneous manner—of applying terms to outward and visible corporations, which belong to the Spiritual Church alone. Speaking of an outward and visible Ecclesiastical Corporation as "Holy Church,"—"Our Mother," "She,"—as "Her in whom the third Person of "the Blessed Trinity abideth for ever,"—is utterly misleading: there is no outward and visible Church spoken of as "our Mother," as "Holy" in Scripture. It is the "Jerusalem WHICH IS "ABOVE, which is the Mother of us all."

Finally, without in the least presuming to say what the word "Church" really does or should mean, and without attempting to dictate in what manner and in what sense it may be used with propriety, it is desired strongly to insist on the importance of having a clear and definite idea in the mind of the speaker, and of expressing that idea in clear and definite language, to be understood by the hearers. Let there be no doubt what is alluded to, be it—

Some particular outward and visible Ecclesiastical body of men;

Or, the invisible Church of all true Christians;

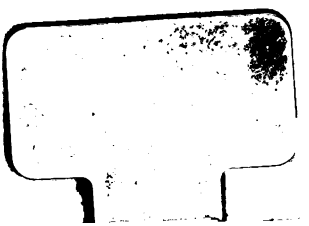
Or, a myth—a supposed universal outward and visible Church, which never did exist, except in man's imagination.

The previous issues of this pamphlet, of which 21,000 have been already printed, have, as might be expected, brought out the well-known difficulty of fixing the readers' attention on the main point, the main object, in the mind of the writer —namely, the definite meaning of the word "Church" when spoken of as an authority. Has it a definite meaning or has it not? that is the question. When a man speaks of the Bible he refers to a definite book—a book he can lay on the table, known the world over as the book called "The Bible." The value of this book and the authority to be attached to it, or the use to be made of it, is altogether another question. All that is now insisted upon is that it is definite, tangible, and known by all men as "The Bible."

On the other hand no attempt is made to explain what is referred to by the word "Church," when used as an authority distinct from the particular tenets and ordinances of each ecclesiastical corporation. The Creeds—the Fathers—the Councils are spoken of as of authority only when accepted by "the Church" —but no attempt is made to indicate or define "The Church." If this "authority" be contained in printed documents—what is it that would

be laid on the table by the side of the Bible? Or if it be a "living voice" in which this authority abides, how is a man, who seeks, to find it? Is he to apply to the minister of a Church? if so, to whom? In the writer's parish there is a Methodist, a Baptist, an Independent, a low Churchman of the Established Church, there are moderately high, decidedly high, ultra-Ritualist, and Roman Catholic, each one of whom will maintain, that the body with which he is connected holds Christian doctrine and Christian ordinances as held by the purest Churches from the time of the Apostles down to the present. Under these circumstances what practical step is a man to take who, having his Bible, still desires "Church authority" and "Church guidance?"

If this "Church authority" be not a phantom, a mere idea floating in the minds of one particular section of Christians—what is it? Where is it? How is it to be referred to? Let those who uphold "Church authority" as an authority concurrent with Scripture consider calmly, truthfully, but withal practically this question—not whether Church authority shall or shall not be accepted, but whether any such thing exists, and if so where to be found?



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